

**Original Research Article**

**The Impact of Thatcher’s Economic Policy of Curbing the Mining Trade Union on the British Society of the Eighties as Represented in David Edgar’s *That Summer* (1987): A Critical Analysis in the light of the New Historicist Literary Theory**

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**ABSTRACT**

Theatre plays a great role in understanding and analyzing history. The dramatization of the events taken place during a specific period of time enables the audience to make their own subjective interpretation of these events. Such dramatic portrayal offers a comprehensive vision of history offered by all categories of the society. Reading Margaret Thatcher’s era through studying theatrical works helps us to understand well that period of history. In fact, enhancing the British economic system is the most prominent feature of Thatcher’s era. One of the most controversial policies of Thatcher’s economic programme was curbing the Mining Trade Unions’ power. The Thatcherite economic system excluded many groups such as the ethnic minorities, women, unemployed and the low-paid to participate in decision-making. From here emerged the idea of unfairness, struggle, and the government’s prejudice against specific categories in the society which inevitably led to the social imbalance in the British society of that time. Thatcher was concerned with supporting the operation of the market economy by freeing up the supply of Labour, by restricting the collective rights of workers in trade unions and by curbing their political power. All these measures led to the damage of trade unions as they were no longer an effective political power. To explore how the economic policy of curbing the trade unions’ power affects the ordinary social life of the British society of the 80s, David Edgar’s play *That Summer* (1987) is analyzed in the light of the new historicist literary theory. Such critical reading of the play shows to what extent this policy is a failure by depicting the misery and suffering of the miners and their families. The playwright chooses to be by the side of the miners expressing the amount of oppression and marginalization they were exposed to as a result of saying "No" to Thatcher’s unfair measures.

**Introduction**

Like all institutions affected by Thatcher’s economic policies, the theatre changed drastically during her era as well. What was more serious was that her economic measures affected not only the budget of the British theatre, but also its ideologies (Peacock, 1999, p. 60). In fact, Thatcher’s campaign to implant the concepts of capitalism in minds led to the emergence of left-wing dramatists like David Edgar who refused Thatcher’s economic policies and tried to show the defects of her rule in his theatrical works (p.2). Edgar saw that the left-wing writers had to

develop a new theatrical discourse that would be able to criticize, reject, and confront the Thatcherite ideologies. The mentality of such left-wing dramatists resulted in producing new kinds of plays that criticized frankly Thatcher's economic policies. One of such plays is David Edgar's *That Summer* (1987). Edgar's *That Summer* (1987) dramatizes the social impact of Thatcher's attempt at demolishing the Mining Trade Union by reducing the miners' wages, closing mine pits and imposing extra taxes on the miners.

## Methodology

Edgar's *That Summer* (1987) is read in the light of the new historicist literary theory. Reading the play in the light of this theory offers varying approaches for understanding the play in the light of the context of its history, its playwright and its readers. New Historicism is a critical perspective that appeared in the 1980s at the hands of its main exponent Stephen Greenblatt. It can be seen as a 'return' to history (Colebrook, 1997, p.1). Reading the play in the light of the new historicist concepts attempts at presenting the forgotten, ignored 'Other' to the narrative of history (p.2). It enables the readers to perceive history from the lens of those people who are marginalized and dismissed. It offers them an opportunity to consider how the oppressed and dominated categories in any society see and understand history. It presents another version of history completely different from that written by the dominating category, it is about reflecting "the lost life" (p.3). To explore what Edgar intends to discuss in his play, I attempt a set of the new historicist principles to apply throughout the research such as marginalization, fake harmony, resistance, no ultimate truth, and how the work is a real representation of its time and author. Therefore, analyzing Edgar's *That summer* (1987) in the light of the new historicist theory draws the reader's attention to the forgotten and neglected questions which are never examined or discussed by Thatcher's institutions.

Edgar's *That Summer* (1987) is considered his outstanding response against Thatcher's economic measures imposed on the miners. In 1980, Thatcher appointed Ian MacGregor as the Chairman of the Nationalized British Steel Corporation. This decision was totally refused by the National Union of the Mineworkers because of MacGregor's reputation of being a fierce enemy to the working class and because of his illegal deals; he was known as "the American butcher of British Industry". MacGregor was known for his aggressive attitude towards the miners in particular; his policies towards the miners were purely Thatcherite as he sought to turn them to profitable agents. So, his strategy was to cut jobs and close unprofitable pits; this decision led the miners to hold their strike that lasted for a whole year (Macintyre, 1998). Therefore, Edgar writes *That Summer* (1987) as a kind of support to the cause of struggling against Thatcher's oppressive decisions. It represents the issue of the miners' strike from the perspective of those helpless miners who were suffering and tortured.

*That Summer* (1987) was first performed on 2 July 1987 at the Hampstead Theatre, London. It consists of two acts; each contains three scenes. It is about an upper-class family; Howard, Cressida, and Daniel, who has a friend Terry, a school teacher. Terry introduces them to the miner Alun and his daughter Michele and her friend Frankie. Howard's family is spending the summer in their home at North Wales. They invite Alun's daughter and her friend to stay with them as a sort of support to the miners' strike.

The new historicist concept of marginalizing the dominated by the dominating is strongly evident while reading the play (Tyson, 2006, p.287). The new historicist critics state that one's ideology is the product of his social class; however, the ruling class is the only power that imposes its ideology on all classes convincing them that its economic interest is the economic interest of the entire society. It tries to persuade the people that any opposing opinion to its policies is a betrayal. In fact, such ruling power manipulates even literature and texts to impose its policies and make them dominant (Abd- El Fattah, 2013, p. 105). Thus according to New Historicism, there are two powers: the dominating and the dominated, the marginalizing and the marginalized, and it is the task of the new historicist to be the voice of the marginalized as Stephen Greenblatt himself argues that while analyzing any work of art the critic should handle the marginal rather than the center; what is neglected should be regarded (Balkaya,

2014, p.7070). Therefore, New Historicism is fundamentally connected with the concept of power relations in society.

Edgar intends *That Summer* (1987) to be a representation of the marginalized people, to be a tool of expressing the views of the dominated, the miners. Such marginalization causes a sort of gap and struggle between both powers creating something like two nations inside a sole country. The idea of the two nations caused by Thatcher's economic policies is presented at the very beginning of the play. In fact, Alun's family is from the South; the place characterized by its industrial nature; so it is largely affected by Thatcher's capitalist reform. Thatcher deregulates markets creating free markets which in turn causes corruption and monopoly. Consequently, such monopoly leads to a great increase in the price of almost all goods; this matter increases the rates of inflation. Therefore, these high rates of inflation as well as the new rules of the privatization programme lead to dismissing a large number of employees and workers and definitely doubling the problem of unemployment. Thus, because the majority of the population of the South is workers employed in the industrial institutions, they are the most miserable British population affected by Thatcher's economic policies. Such South/North isolation is echoed in Terry's words in which he expresses his miserable life, especially his father's, because of the fact that they are from the South. Thus, he is forced to leave the South, but unfortunately as a person affiliated to the working class, he will never find comfort anywhere; he escapes "from the coal face to the chalk face" (Edgar, *That Summer*, 1987, p.372)<sup>2</sup>.

Such separation from which the English people suffered at Thatcher's time, creates a kind of severe gap between classes and categories. This is very obvious throughout the play as there is a wide gap between Howard's family, representing the upper class, and Alun's family, representing the working class. Such a gap is clear even in the matters of speaking, eating, and dressing. This is illustrated in a conversation between Michele, Frankie and Daniel when the girls do not understand Daniel's accent:

**DANIEL.** You come from- South Wales as I gather. From the south.

**MICHELE.** Correct.

**FRANKIE.** You know- the valleys.

*Pause*

**DANIEL.** Mm. The Rhondda.

*His rounded, hard-d pronunciation pushes the girls over the edge. They crack up. DANIEL is furious*

Yes?

**MICHELE.** It's – Rhondda.

**FRANKIE.** (*with an odd, offhand gesture*). Rhondda Valley.

**DANIEL** *can talk no more.* (p.341)

Here, the girls do not know what Daniel means by the "valley" because of his accent which is different from theirs as his accent is like the upper class while theirs is like the working class. This situation makes Daniel furious as the girls do not understand him; this matter causes embarrassment to the girls making them feel the gap between them and the upper-class people.

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<sup>2</sup> All further references to Edgar's *That Summer* (1987) are to *David Edgar: Plays:3: Our Own People. Teendreams. Maydays. That Summer*. London: Methuen Drama, 1987.

Such a gap between classes is also shown in the matter of foods. As working-class people, the girls are not accustomed to the idea of eating barbecue. Their uneasiness while eating is obviously apparent in the following conversation:

**CRESSIDA.** And would you ... like some wine?

*They –the girls- nod. Everyone else sits. Wine is poured.*

And ... chicken tikka?

*They look bemused at the skewers.*

**HOWARD.** It is mildly curried.

*They shake their heads.*

**TERRY.** Spareribs? You eat them with your fingers.

*FRANKIE and MICHELE look at each other and shake their heads. The souvlaki has been de-threaded. . .*

*Part of the problem for MICHELE and FRANKIE has been not knowing how much to take, so as the others serve themselves with ample portions they glance at each other. (p.349 - 350)*

The girls are confused on the dining table regarding how many pieces should they take? And whether they can eat with their fingers or not? This reflects the uneasiness which they feel when dealing with the upper-class family.

Dressing is another sphere where the gap between classes is explored. It is clear when Frankie does not know the way she should be dressed for a tennis match. She wears a skirt and a T-shirt that are not matching. Thus, she feels embarrassed when she sees the way Cressida is dressed for the same match. However, Howard assures Frankie that everything is okay and she is beautiful; as a sign of supporting her; Frankie says "oh, I didn't know we'd got to dress up like" and Howard replies "It's all right, Frankie. You look absolutely fine" (p.357). In fact, Frankie is not dressed properly because she is not used to go to such matches or such occasions because her social level does not permit her to attend such events.

This wide gap between classes creates a sort of hatred and even atrocity between the dominating and the dominated powers. This hatred is shown in the song sung by the girls in front of the family:

What shall we do with Margaret Thatcher

What shall we do with Margaret Thatcher

What shall we do with Margaret Thatcher

Early in the morning

Cut her down to size and privatise her

Cut her down to size and privatise her

Cut her down to size and privatise her

Early in the morning

.....

What shall we do with Neil Kinnock

Stick him in the flightpath of a flying picket

What shall we do with Ian McGregor?

Hang hang hang the bastards

Burn burn burn the bastards

Burn burn burn the bastards

Burn burn burn the bastards

Early in the morning! (p.375 - 376)

Here, the girls show their disdain for Thatcher and her administrators like Neil Kinnock, the manager of the labour party and Ian MacGregor, the manager of the National Coal Board. Their hatred for Thatcher is obvious in their use of severe words such as "cut down", "privatize", "hang", "burn", and "stick".

The gap caused by the economic-status differences affects not only the girls' attitude, but also their psychological state. In fact, the girls are emotionally expatriated from Howard's family. They feel that they are marginalized and the family hosts them as a kind of sympathy and pity. So, they feel that they are obliged to work as clowns in front of them in order to convince the family of their cause. This idea is stressed in the conversation between Michele and Terry:

**TERRY.** What did they say? Your mum and dad?

**MICHELE.** Oh, best behaviour. Emissaries of the strike. Ambassadors for our community.

**TERRY.** And did you like that? Was that a role you enjoy?

*Michele doesn't answer*

Tell me what you find most strange. . . .

**MICHELE.** Having food served separate. Salad and vegetables and all that stuff. Like, you've no idea how much you're s'posed to take. (p.393 - 394)

In this quotation, Michele defines the reason behind their residence with this upper middle-class family: they are sent there in order to work as emissaries of the strike. So, they must act in an artificial behavior. This matter forces the girls to act as angels not as human beings and, in fact, this irritates them intensely. It is clear that the girls are not used to the life style of the upper-class family.

Realizing such great distance between the miners' girls as a working class and Howard's family as an upper class, the girls become very sensitive towards any word said to them. They believe that the others' view of them is of sympathy and pity not of equality and respect. They link between the others' attitude towards them and their social status. This sensitivity is shown in a situation in which Howard decides to take the whole family to an ancient place such as a castle or a monastery and Michele becomes happy because of this promising picnic. However, Terry annoys Michele as he says:

**TERRY.** What's it really like for you? I mean, it must be pretty tough. (*pause.*) With no new clothes. No records. Treats. It must be hard.

**MICHELE** (*aggressively*). Well, we're not starving, anyway. (*pause.*) I mean, those things, they're not important. So, we had to send the video back, but the house is still kept nice and tidy. It's not like we're in, you know, real poverty.

**TERRY.** What do you mean by that?

**MICHELE.** I mean, it's not like no one taking proper care of things. It's not like scrawling on the walls and business in the lifts and water coming through the roof and everybody lying round on pot and heroin. I mean, we've not descended to that level. We're not tramps or thieves. We've kept our pride. (p.352)

Michele's sensitivity is very obvious in this conversation as she shows extreme pride when Terry tells her that going to historical places will not be enjoyable without new clothes. At this moment, Michele feels insulted and humiliated because she is poor and helpless. In fact, this belief is not invented by the girls, it is the belief adopted by the capitalist atmosphere of the country. This belief appears on the surface when Thatcher's government calls the striking miners 'enemies' just because their views are against its own. Moreover, Thatcher herself declares that anyone who shall not work shall not eat. Then, the society is prepared to devalue the poor people considering them vulgar and nasty when they call for their rights or express their opinions. Hence, this is the background settled in the girls' mind about themselves. This enhances the new historicist reading of the play as it is very obvious how much the dominating power representing Thatcher's government tries hard to implant its ideologies in the British people's mind through its speeches and measures. Unfortunately, it succeeds to some extent to make the miners 'enemies' to their people.

Writing history through the marginalized eyes evokes the new historicist concept of rebellion and resistance. This concept is deeply rooted in the approach of the new historicist critics while analyzing any work of art as Newton argues in her book *Starting Over: Feminism and Politics of Cultural Critique* (1994):

According to New Historicism, there is a notion that history is best told as a story of power relations and struggle, a story that is contradictory, heterogeneous, and fragmented. There is a notion that hegemonic power is part but not all of the story, that history is a tale of many voices and forms of power, of power exercised by the weak and the marginal as well as the dominant and strong. (p.28)

Thus, while the dominating power tries hardly to implant its ideologies over the dominated, the latter does not stand hand-cuffed but rather insists on taking its rights by many ways including peaceful rebellion.

Reading *That Summer* (1987) while bearing in mind the new historicist concept of rebellion and resistance reveals the working class' attempts at rebelling against Thatcher's government in order to prove themselves in the society as an effective power. In the play, this rebellion is embodied in the miners' insistence on continuing their strike, in spite of all hardships, until their demands are fulfilled. This persistent spirit is clear in Alun, one of the striking miners, who strongly believes in his case and rights. He argues that this strike is not for wages or conditions but rather for survival. He heartily believes in what they are doing even though they are starved and deprived of their salaries. This is demonstrated when he is talking with Cressida about the stopping of the power station and trains and hence all journeys because of the shortage of coal. Then, he shows no sympathy as he says that "the train's journey will stop when the light is finished" (p.343). Nevertheless, he feels proud of what the miners are doing considering themselves revolutionaries who call for the rights of the marginalized. Such pride is further shown when Terry narrates to Michele the story of the demonstration held by the dockworkers to release their fellow detained by the police through a march organized by them. When Terry participated in this demonstration, he felt proud, full of dignity and even safe, he says:

But, on this march, surrounded by the best, the brightest, the most militant and self-assured and conscious and aware of all the working class, I had this strange sensation that I was at home. Back home. (p.395)

Moreover, this feeling was expressed again when Terry participated in a march for the miners' cause; he says "And last month, we had a march and rally for the miners. Wonderful. So wonderful" (p.395). Here, Edgar uses words such as "the best", "the brightest", "wonderful", and "the most militant" to express the goodness of the

working class. He emphasizes that those who participate in demonstrations deserve respect and support because they have the courage to express the agony of their class. They are good enough to the extent that Terry felt as if being at home.

The concept of pride and dignity of the dominated categories is also echoed when Howard decides to give the girls two parcels as a kind of support. However, Terry, being one of the working class, considers such an act a sort of charity that would embarrass the girls as they will feel patronized. What Terry expects is exactly what happens. When Frankie opens her gift and finds it a boot and a set of skating blades, she pushes the gift away, bursts into tears, and runs out. She considers it a kind of charity from the family in order to achieve her aim of continuing skating. Thus, she feels injured and embarrassed. Terry explains that such miners are not calling for luxury or taking money from people to support their strike. They consider it a kind of pity opposed to their dignity and pride; they are not beggars; they are liberals calling for equality among all categories of the society. Terry explains to Howard that the strikers share even suffering, he says "I've seen them sharing out the cornflakes. Virtually counting grains of rice. And it is via the discovery of those old principles of equality of suffering, of share, and share like" (p.401). So, the girls may consider such a gift as a betrayal to their family and their class strike. Therefore, even though they lead a comfortable life among Howard's family, they feel nostalgia to their homes, their food and even their suffering. Hence, they decide to leave Howard's family in order to be beside their families in their resistance.

Reading *That Summer* (1987) critically evokes not only the new historicist concept of rebellion embodied in the miners' strike, but also such concept of rebellion embodied in the upper-class support of such kind of struggle. In fact, Edgar considers both classes, in spite of their different social status, as dominated power because they both do not believe in Thatcher's ideologies and fight against them, each with its tools and possibilities. The struggle of the upper class is clear in Howard's family's support for the miners' cause by hosting two of the miners' girls. Such support is clearly apparent in Cressida's speeches. She is strongly defending the cause of the strike. She has a strong belief that the strikers will win because their cause is fair and they are demanding their rights only and nothing else. Her belief in the winning of the strikers is shown when Howard tells her "what if they lose" and she replies "they won't" "they can't" (p.388). Cressida sees the miners as heroes, describing them as "wonderful brave people in their T-shirts and their trainers" who are "up against the helmets and the trucheoars and the shields" only because they are supporting and defending their right (p.387). Her belief in victory is apparent as she is definitely sure that the strikers "will be crowned with great victory and success in Christmas" (p.388). She thinks that to be totally absorbed in your life neglecting the suffering of others is like being chained in a room with a sole door. However, if you let yourself know about other's problems, it is like a journey to find another door beyond the tight one.

Such rebellion and resistance recall in minds the new historicist concept of fake harmony. Greenblatt in the introduction of his book *Shakespearean Negotiations: Circulation of Social Energy in Renaissance* (1998) argues that there is nothing called total harmony in society. He admits that through studying the Shakespearean Renaissance works, he is persuaded that "Elizabethan and Jacobean visions of hidden unity seemed like anxious rhetorical attempts to conceal cracks, conflict, and disarray" (p.2). Moreover, Greenblatt is convinced that the societies of the 1980s are characterized by "feudal relations" where selves are only defined by their social status (Colebrook, 1997, p.198). As a result of such categorization of society, harmony among classes is eventually faded. Then, it is the task of the new historicist critic to focus on examining the cracks and fragments of any age rather than its superficial harmony.

Edgar believes that the agreement which Thatcher claims in media that her monetary policies are accepted by all English people is just an allusion. She pretends that those who refuse her measures are just a minority who seek to sabotage the country. Such fake harmony and discord are revealed in the play at two levels; one of them is

among the members of the same family as shown in Daniel's attitude towards his family, and the other is among the different categories of the society who cannot accept each other.

Daniel's attitude towards his family and his stance of refusing his father's way of thinking echoes the fragmented relations in the British society of the eighties. In spite of being convinced of the justice of the miners' cause, he feels no sympathy towards such category. This is obviously shown at the beginning of the play when he becomes very upset because of the presence of the two girls with them in their holiday. He may not understand this kind of support which Howard offers to Alun's family because of being a striking miner. Daniel deals with the girls in a very aggressive way. It is very clear when he answers his father when asking him about the reason behind his anger, "I'm peeved because I don't know why they're here. And I don't know why I'm here" (p.354). He tells his father that his way of dealing with the girls is ultimately ridiculous. He does not treat them as miners' girls who have different culture and different attitude. He treats them as if "they're 40, middle-class and male" (p.397). The family does not change any of their life style to suit the girls or even teach them how to behave like them. It is clear in eating time, as according to the family's rules the food is served separately; so the girls are getting fairly confused how much should they take? And how should they eat? This matter definitely embarrasses them.

Daniel sets an example to those upper-class people who insist on keeping a distance between their class and the working people. He sees that they are simple, humble girls who do not receive good kind of education, so they are not allowed to even speak with him because of their strange accent. This is obvious when he mocks them while imitating their way of pronouncing words. This may reflect the attitude of the majority of the upper class towards the working class as they see them inferior to their class. Daniel's aggressive attitude is revealed as well in the harsh and inhumane way he wakes the girls up. This shows the deep separation between classes in Britain, the matter that inflicts emotional pain to the girls that they are marginalized and deprived of many things leading a harsh life only because they are poor miners' girls.

This fake agreement is noticed among all categories of the society not only between the upper and the lower. There is aggression and sometimes hatred from the majority towards the minority and from the dominating towards the dominated. The minority in *That Summer* (1987) is further exemplified in females. Edgar stresses the dominance of the patriarchal side of the society. He wants to show that in the British society of 1980s, which pretends civilization and equality, the minority is oppressed and marginalized. Edgar expresses his opinion on Terry's tongue. The playwright criticizes the way the whole society reacts towards marginalized categories especially women. He wonders how the man deals with his wife in the village? Does the man allow his wife to go to the city? To ask him to take care of his kids or to cook the tea? He expresses how women are dealt with as a minority. They are dominated by men and by the law of the society that does not allow them to take their rights. This idea is assured in Alun's attitude; Alun hates and rejects the concept of feminism describing it as "dreadful" (p.345). Moreover, Howard mocks Cressida's friend who believes in feminism describing her as "furious" all the time about everything even words that have not been uttered yet (p.350).

Hence, the British society is not in harmony in spite of the dominating power's claims. In fact, there are two contesting sides, each of which tries to write history from its own perspective representing its sole version of truth. In fact, New Historicism as a theory is deeply influenced by Foucault's writings (Sturrock, 1979, p.93). Foucault sees literature as another discourse manipulated through and by a culture's power struggle (Miller, 1987, p.21). Accordingly, he argues that a literary work cannot be interpreted within a single context that it may represent, but rather via multiple voices in order to have different versions of truth, each expresses its power (Colebrook, 1997, p.207). Thus, Foucault's historicist perspective is based on the concept that any historical representation is not unified and truthful, but rather unstable and partial; for him "truth is provisional" (Miller, 1987, p.23). New historicist critics argue that history is not fixed because it is affected and reconceived according to the culture which is definitely changeable and various (Gallagher and Greenblatt, 2000, p.9). Therefore, the new historicist reading of *That Summer* (1987) brings to mind the concept that history should not be written by



the dominating power only, but rather by the dominated one as well. Hence, this is echoing the new historicist concept of the multiple truths; there is no ultimate truth, but rather versions of it.

Writing history is one of the issues recalled in mind while reading *That Summer* (1987) from a new historicist perspective. On Howard's tongue, Edgar argues that such "bloody woman", Thatcher, would write history as she wishes (p.395). She would concentrate on the silliness and triviality of that decade, ignoring any revolutionary actions that happened at her time. Such revolutionary action, like the miners' strike, would not be written as the revolutionists and reformists see, but rather as the regime sees (p.404). These acts would be written as acts of sabotage and corruption not of revolution and reform. Therefore, as a response to the forged history which Thatcher alludes to, Howard tries to collect materials and write history from a revolutionary point of view in order to secure another version of truth for people to come (p.405). This is clear when Howard decides to write a version of history as a substitute for the one written by Thatcher's institutions. In this play, Edgar gives voice to the forgotten category- the working class- in order to present the other side of truth regardless of the fake harmony that Thatcher tries to show in media. Regarding the miners' cause, there is a wide gap between the government's perception of the strike and the miners' perception of it. This is apparent when Alun states that Thatcher calls them "enemy" not citizens calling for their rights; meanwhile Cressida calls them "wonderful revolutionaries" (p.342). Therefore, writing history from the marginalized point of view offers a completely different version of truth proving that the concept of ultimate truth is definitely wrong.

To realize the role of any category in history, the work of art should be analyzed within the social, political, and economic context of its production, the context in which the author himself has lived as well as the context of the reader. For new historicist critics, literature should be read as history and history should be read as literature (Greenblatt, *Shakespearean Negotiation*, 1998, p.5). They intend any work of art to be an accurate reflection of its time. One should feel while reading any work of art that he/she reads the history of the time dealt with in the work. Greenblatt argues in his well-known essay *Resonance and wonder* (1990) that the reader should make a link between the meaning of the text and its social, political and economic conditions in order to explore his/her understanding of history, he says:

The New Historicism obviously has distinct affinities with resonance; that its concern with literary text has been to recover as far as possible the historical circumstances of their original production and consumption and to analyze the relationship between these circumstances and our own. new historicist critics have tried to understand the intersecting circumstances not as stable, prefabricated background against which the literary texts can be placed, but as dense network of evolving and often contradictory social forces. The idea is not found outside the work of art some rock onto which literary interpretation can be securely chained but rather to situate the work in relation to other representational practices operative in the culture at a given moment in both history and our own. (p.19)

When *That Summer* (1987) is placed within the cultural context of its production, it would be a mirror of people's morale providing an image of the social ills at that time such as greed, hypocrisy and individualism. It acts as a book of history about Thatcher's time. In such life of deals, packages and bets, there is no room for emotions. People absorbed in this life only think about money, how they could be richer and how they could be more powerful regardless of their social or family obligations; they become selfish. As for the idea of greed, it is shown when we know how Daniel's mother Gilian, a prominent producer in the Television, is immersed in her life of deals and bets to the extent that she sends her child Daniel to live with his father and step-mother because she is busy with her work forgetting her son's rights. The most important thing to her is her work. This idea is also stressed when Howard is invited to a television programme and Cressida expresses her fear that in such life of lights and money, there is no opportunity for anyone to "love" (p.388).

Hypocrisy is one of the fatal ills in any authoritarian society. In such a mean, bleak atmosphere, the hypocrites are strongly evident. They applaud the dominating authority whether it is right or wrong. The dictatorial administration seems to be content by creating such lackeys who support it. However, those hypocrites are not only found on the formal arena, but also on the social one. This hypocrisy is prevailing along with other social ills in Thatcher's state. Thus, the real, genuine opposition exemplified partly in the miners does not only fight the dictator's authority, but also its reactionary lackeys. This is illustrated when Terry tells the company that the miners have won over the Coal Board and its lackeys, whom the girls describe as "paper tigers" and "running dogs" (p.371).

Furthermore, the concept of individualism is obviously stressed in *That Summer* (1987); each one acts as if he were living alone in the society not as a member of a group. Thatcher's capitalist system does its best in order to eliminate the socialist concept of collective welfare from people's mind. The technique which Thatcher follows to transfer the British people's ideology of collectivism to individualism was to absorb them in consuming activities. This is obvious in Terry's words when he makes a comparison between socialism and capitalism. Under the socialist system, collective reason – thinking together in an attempt to find solutions for any existing problems - is very essential. Terry says that he was born beside a pit that had a slogan saying "come, let us reason together" (p.373). Reasoning is highly important in the collective ideology of socialism. There is no authoritarianism in taking decisions, completely opposite to Thatcher's authoritarian ideology as she is the sole person who can take decisions. With the coming of Thatcher's authority, the government seeks to stop people reasoning together and its way was to:

[S]ell them music centers, TV sets and videos and cram their clubs with booze and bingo rather than old-fashioned stuff like billiards and all those boring books, so instead of doing things together they'd get done apart. (p.373)

This, in fact, enhances the concept of individualism forcing people to think individually in their benefits with no regard to others. This is emphasized in Frankie's words that welfare for the working class is building disco and bingo, activities that consume one's energy without giving him/her any benefit or even let him/her think. In short, activities that make people absent-minded. However, when Cressida wonders that they do not go trips or make colliery brass band –collective reasoning activities- Frankie thinks that she is joking (p.373). Therefore, in Thatcher's time the concept of collective welfare is collapsed and the concept of individualism is built.

Thus, reading *That Summer* (1987) as a book of history makes the reader aware of the British people's economic and social status at that time. It reflects the deterioration of the society caused by the oppressive power. The economic measures imposed on the miners, like job-cuts and taxes, affect not only the economic status of the miners but also their psychological status. The capitalist policies imposed on the miners make their social conditions worse. They are deprived of all entertaining activities which the upper class is enjoying, not only the entertaining ones, but even the basic components of life. Such deprivation is shown when Daniel steals the cassette that Michele has made by herself because she becomes desperate of having one because it costs much. This way of life makes the girls very sensitive. Besides their over sensitivity, they do not feel secured. This is clearly reflected in Frankie's fear of future. When Cressida foretells her future, she becomes upset and even frightened as she feels that she has no future because under such economic atmosphere she is even deprived of dreaming of a future.

The deprivation which the working class suffers from under Thatcher's regime is stressed when Michele explains to the rest the reason behind Frankie's upset when future is mentioned. She says that Frankie is used to skate and she is a very good skater who will be a professional player and may win the national competition. But unfortunately, when the miners' strike has lasted for a long time and her father is deprived of his salary, Frankie decides to sell her skating stuff and give the money to her Dad and Mum as a means of supporting them. Even though Frankie does this while she is content, she feels emotionally inflicted as she realizes how much they are

forgotten, marginalized and deprived of even dreaming of a better future. They are doomed to poverty, illness and humiliation. This is clear in Frankie's words to Cressida while talking about future, she says:

[T]o be honest, the kind of future that you think about, the kind of future that's a normal thing for you . . . for us, it's just a joke. I mean, like just a fantasy. (p.383)

In these lines, Frankie explains that they never think about future as Howard's family thinks about it. So that when they are asked about their plans for future, they either escape from the question or make it up. This is clear when Howard asks them what they prefer to be in the future and Michele takes a long time to answer "archaeologist" (p.383). In fact, she takes such time not because she is thinking, but because she has never thought about her future. She believes that under social conditions like hers, there will be no future. Therefore, they are convinced that Thatcher's economic policies are behind all their miseries. This is obvious in Frankie's criticism of Thatcher's heartless policies, she says:

Well, all I said was. That you know they call her 'iron maiden'. But I don't see her in that light at all. (*Pause.*) Like, I see her like those posh girls at the rink in Swansea, gliding so easy 'cross the ice, like they haven't got a care. 'Cos you see, I think, to her, we're only frozen faces. Faces, frozen in the ice, for her to glide upon. I think she skates on people's faces. (*Pause.*) And let's be frank. However much you care, you're the spectator. You are looking on. While we – we're looking up. (p.384)

Here, Frankie refers to Thatcher as a posh skating girl who sees such miners as "frozen faces" on which she is skating gladly and with no mercy. She explains that under Thatcher's regime, there is no place for patriotic opposition, what is needed is those hypocrites who know nothing but applaud the dominating power in spite of being wrong. But the one who cares about his/her nation would find no chance to participate.

Therefore, according to Frankie's words, Thatcher does not care about any categories' rights, conditions, or calls; she cares only about achieving her aim of reducing the expenditure of the state. In fact, she intends to do this even if it would be on the corpses of the miners or even it would cause devastating side effects like inflation or unemployment. Thatcher does not see such miners as human beings, but rather as stones that hinder her process. Therefore, she must get rid of them by letting them cry without any solution until being starved or even dead (p.384).

Taking the new historicist concepts into consideration, the reader can realize that this play is highly influenced by the context in which Edgar himself has lived. He is a liberal, democratic revolutionary who adopts the principles of socialism. He dedicates part of his works to analyze and comment on the postwar political situation in Britain. Being brought up in a time in which the socialist liberalism of the 1960s was dominant, Edgar's approach in writing is that of presenting the events on the local political arena in a socialist context (Luckhurst, 2006, p.441). His socialist perspective in writing is obviously stated in his journalistic writings, once he says:

I don't feel that until I left university my socialism developed beyond combining being quite a good public speaker and quite a good polemical writer with a sense of social injustice, emerging from horror at the hydrogen bomb, plus a sense of disillusion with the labour government and of outrage at the Vietnam War. (Edgar, as cited in Luckhurst, 2006, p.441)

Moreover, he witnesses the collapse of communism<sup>3</sup> and its principles which is considered a turning point in his life. Then, his dreams of achieving socialist ideas start to shake; however, he decides to challenge and to defend his principles considering communism not his agenda as he says:

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<sup>3</sup> "Communism" is defined in Merriam Webster as a way of organizing a society in which the government owns the things that are used to make and transport products (such as land, oil, factories, ships, etc.) and there is no privately owned property.

I had never been a communist and I never felt that the Soviet Union was my team. But on the other hand I did feel in the 80s increasingly that you couldn't just blame it all on the historical mistake. When the wall came down, I did feel it was the death of the ideals that I had a relationship with and I feel that I should write about it. (O'mahony, 2004)

Therefore, Edgar - being affected by his background – adopts in his writings the side of the marginalized people in an attempt to convince the readers of his noble socialist principles. He tries to present a parallel substitute for Thatcher's capitalist system which he is fiercely against. Moreover, according to New Historicism, the work should be analyzed within the context of the reader as well because the perception of the work differs from one reader to another because each has his/ her own specific social, political and economic backgrounds that shape his/ her understanding of the work (Abd- El-Fattah, 2013, p.122).

### **Conclusion**

Through the new historicist reading of *That Summer* (1987), the reader becomes aware of the dreadful impacts of Thatcher's economic policy of destroying the Mining Trade Union on the British society of that time. Such critical reading explores the bitter conflict between Thatcher's dominating government and the miners as a result of its harsh economic policies. In fact, those economic measures widen the gap between the rich and the poor as they make the rich richer and the poor poorer. Therefore, Thatcher's time is considered a jungle in which the poor, namely the miners, has no place. Thus, they are completely absorbed in having their daily bread. Being ignored and humiliated, those miners intend to take their rights through an internationally- recognized channel, namely strike. But as a dictator, Thatcher either blocks channels of expression or pays no attention to the demands expressed. The way Thatcher has dealt with the miners affects the social and psychological state of those helpless people. Such way creates an atmosphere which is considered a proper environment of many social ills. The emergence of such social ills echoes the deficiency of Thatcher's economic policies. Therefore, the community reaches a point of upheaval in which each party is quarreling with the other. This is the community created by Thatcher's policies and it is the new historicist's task to examine its cracks and clashes.

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